

City of Alexandria, Virginia

PARK AND RECREATION COMMISSION

Regular Meeting

Thursday, April 23, 2015, 7:00 p.m.
Lee Center – 1108 Jefferson St.
Alexandria, VA 22314

Summary Minutes

Members Present: Jennifer Atkins, Co-Chair; Gina Baum, Rich Brune, Secretary, Ripley Forbes, Alexis Browand, Emma Schutzius. Brian McPherson.

Absent: Stephen Beggs, Judy Coleman (recused), Co-Chair, William Cromley, Catherine Poulin.

RPCA Staff Present: James Spengler, Director; Dinesh Tiwari, Deputy Director, Park Operations; Jack Browand, Division Chief, Public Information, Special Events, and Waterfront Operations; Ron Kagawa, Division Chief, Park Planning, Design and Capital Projects; Bethany Carton, Park Planner, Dana Wedeles, Park Planner, Margaret Orlando, Acting Division Chief, Recreation Services, Robin DeShields, Executive Assistant. **Absent:** William Chesley, Deputy Director, Recreation Services.

Guests: none.

I. Call to Order: Co-Chair Atkins called the meeting to order at 7:10 p.m.

II. Items for Information:

A. **Public Comments:** none.

B. **Timeline and Process for Potomac Yard Metrorail Station – Bethany Znidersic, Park Planner, Park Planning, Design and Capital Improvement Program: See Staff Memorandum and P.Y. Metrorail Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS), Executive Summary.**

<http://www.alexandriava.gov/potomacyard/default.aspx?id=56902#DEIS%20Document>

Bethany Znidersic, Park Planner, provided a project update from the recent presentation in February 2015. The Draft EIS was posted on April 3, 2015 online and at several public facilities and will be open for comments until May 18, 2015. It is a federal process with strict deadlines. A NEPA Public Hearing will occur on April 30 and a public hearing before City Council will occur on May 16. The Park and Recreation Commission is encouraged to provide a letter to City Council regarding their position. The website, as listed on the memorandum, has information on the NEPA process, the Draft EIS, past meetings, and Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ). Znidersic encouraged Commissioners to view and read the information online: including introduction, purpose, need, discussion of alternatives, and Chapter 3. The information covers parklands, construction impacts, wetlands and several other factors. She said it would be helpful if people scanned the full Table of Contents in preparation for the meeting that will be held on May 7, at 7:00 p.m. at the Lee Center, 1108 Jefferson St. Znidersic opened the floor up for comments:

Q. Atkins asked regarding the federal process, is there visibility of the comments given on the EIS.

A. Znidersic said not until the 19th or 20th after City Council public hearing on May 16. After the 18th staff will compile comments and share these with the Commission and City Council on May 20.

Q. Baum asked if the B-CSX option is new (See Executive Summary).

A. Znidarsic said it is a new design option, due to the request of the National Park Service (NPS), to see if there is a way to move the CSX tracks out of the fee simple land. Design B-CSX, requires 7,000 feet of land. She said if Alternative B is selected as the preferred Alternative, a net benefit agreement would be required. Information will be coming forward, as to NPS and the final agreement.

Brune encouraged Commissioners to read the report in preparation for the May 7th meeting.

**Note: Co-Chair Coleman (absent) recused herself from Item II-B, Potomac Yard Metrorail discussion.*

III. Neighborhood Parks Draft Improvement Plans Presentation – Dana Wedeles, Park Planner, Park Planning, Design and Capital Projects: To view presentation go to <http://www.alexandriava.gov/uploadedFiles/recreation/info/PRCNeighborhoodParks23April2015.pdf>:

Wedeles gave the presentation on the Draft Neighborhood Park Improvement Plans. The “Plans” will be placed online next week, and will include an online comment board. Signs will also be posted in each park with the web address for comments and feedback, and will remain up until the end of June. The goal is to finalize the “Plans” in the fall 2015. Wedeles said the process is similar to the City-wide Park Planning Process in 2013. Once the Park and Recreation Commission and City Council endorses the park plans staff will prioritize the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) budget based on the plans. The “Plans” will serve as a guiding document for the Department of RPCA, and there are broad recommendations included for all parks (See report). Wedeles reviewed each Neighborhood Park Plans by District: *Please See Existing Conditions and Improvement Recommendations for each Park Plan.*

Following the presentation questions and feedback was taken from the Commission.

District 1 Parks: **Montgomery Park, Powhatan Park, and Lee Center** (*See Park Plans for details*).

a. Lee Center:

It was noted that the Fire Department uses the field for training, and the plan includes building an outdoor exercise station that can be used by the Fire Department and the public.

Q. There is a wall that blocks the view to the Lee Center is it possible to paint a mural there.

A. The wall was installed by VDOT and has a 15 foot easement. Staff has no authority to make any alterations to it.

Q. Do the basketball and tennis courts get much use, as they are not very visible, and does staff have ideas on how to make the public aware of the available Lee Center amenities, in order to increase usage? What is the space on the lower left side of the plan used for?

A. The courts don’t appear heavily used, but are programmed by Recreation Services. There is a plan to outline the tennis courts so they can be used to play pickleball, which has become a popular sport. Improved signage is planned to help increase awareness of available amenities. The area on the lower left side is a canine training area.

Q. Is there a way to increase access of the park?

A. Wedeles said this it is difficult due to the Fire Department using the area in rear for training.

Q. How did this become a storage area for the Fire Department and does RPCA have any concerns about this.

A. Spengler said the top portion east/west is RPCA, and the area that runs north/south is used by the Adult Day Care, the next portion is the Fire Department which doubles as City's emergency management center.

b. Montgomery Park:

Wedeles said RPCA plans to incorporate walking paths into some of the park plans. Staff recently attended a conference in San Francisco, California, where nearly all new parks include a walking path (See presentation).

Q. Does St. Anthony's preschool pay anything for using the park heavily, and is there enough room for children to play soccer.

A. There is no cost for St. Anthony's to use the park; and there is enough space in the center to portion off a rectangle for free play or soccer.

c. Powhatan Park:

Q. There is a proposal to remove the fence; Baum said it was her understanding that the fence was needed in order to keep crime out.

A. Wedeles said the community has not seen the plan yet, but it will be taken back to them.

Q. The proposal for this park includes many things, why not phase in new amenities?

A. This depends on the size of the park, for small parks it would be good to do everything at once.

In response to Atkins, Wedeles said developer contributions have been secured in the amount of \$200,000.

District 2 Parks: Hume Springs, 3550 Commonwealth Avenue, Landover, Goat Hill, Timberland, Hooffs Run Park & Greenway, Beach Park, Angel Park. *(See Park Plans for details).*

a. Angel Park:

McPherson said he doesn't see how building the bleachers into the slope of the park will work, due to the grading and slope of the park. Wedeles said staff will do a field verification of the plan, and can look at putting the stairs on a diagonal.

b. Beach Park:

Q. Will there be some stairs along the hill, and will this prevent sledding down the hill?

A. Wedeles will ask Schutzius, to help outline the sledding path?

Atkins asked if this is impacted by the Maury School improvement plan.

c. 3550 Commonwealth Ave.:

Q. Why isn't a walking path planned for this park?

A. Staff is still deciding on whether or not to put a walking path here based on its size

d. Hooff's Run Park:

Forbes said the dog park violates safety guidelines of the Dog Park Master Plan (DPMP), and is too close to a major road to be safe, and should probably be closed down unless it is fenced. He believes the DPMP is merely advisory, but does not regulate standards for new parks or improvements to existing dog parks. He said the .5 acre standard should be reviewed for new dog parks, but the DPMP does not preclude installing fences at existing dog exercise areas.

Forbes said there is an unfenced dog park at Braddock Rd. and Commonwealth Ave. which also has similar safety concerns due to proximity to major roads. He asked if staff can provide information on accidents involving dogs in this area, and said he worries about the safety of not only dogs, but drivers as well.

Wedeles said staff can revisit this issue when the DPMP is reviewed, and community input will be sought. She said staff can also check with Animal Control regarding accidents. She said if the dog park stays in the plan, landscaping would be put there to help keep dogs from running into the road.

District 3 Parks: Luckett/Skate Park, Taney Avenue Park, Ewald Park, Mulligan Park, Chambliss Park and Stevenson Park. (*See Park Plans for details*).

a. Chambliss Park.

Wedeles said the park currently includes a seldom-used unfenced dog area, and a parking lot. Staff proposes building a nature trail through the wooded area to connect the park to John Adams School, taking out the bollards and putting play equipment for tots in the natural area. The draft park plan proposes the parking lot be removed, and adding an unfenced dog area. She said a fenced dog park cannot be put here because the site is under .5 acres, and is near a Resource Protection Area (RPA).

Forbes said the location of the site encourages dog waste near the RPA. He said if a new dog park is placed here it should be fenced-in, and a general standard should be set to avoid unfenced dog parks, particularly new ones.

Atkins said this is in an early stage of public discussion. There is a dog park that no one uses, instead they use the area at the bottom, and people's use of the dog park is helping to define proposed design of the park. Goal to create a dog park that people will use, but not near the RPA. Look at how the community is actually using the park and what would be the best location for the dog park. **Forbes** said there is no reason to designate this as an unfenced dog area.

Atkins asked **Forbes** for proposed language, which states that this is an open area that may or may not be used for a dog park-because a decision is not yet made.

Wedeles said staff can look at more examples. **Baum** asked for language. **Forbes** said the language should leave the area labeled as to-be-determined. **Wedeles** said it states it would require an amendment to the Dog Park Master Plan. **Forbes** said the Dog Park Master Plan restriction applies to new parks; fencing an existing dog park should not be an issue for the master plan. **Atkins** said Mt. Jefferson has a beautiful proposed unfenced dog area buffered by landscape.

Taney Avenue Park:

Q. Can the path be made wider?

A. The path will be 10 feet.

Next Steps: A series of Community Workshops are planned: District 1 - May 14, 2015, 7 p.m., District 2 - May 27, 7 p.m., District 3 - June 4, 7 p.m. (locations will be determined and publicized.)

Wedeles said following the workshops staff will tweak each plan, and come back with cost estimates. **Atkins** asked about overall public turnout for the meetings. **Wedeles** said 250 online surveys were collected. Turnout in District 2 was good, while turnout in other Districts was more difficult. She said more help is needed in recruiting people for these meetings. **Baum** asked for help

with recruiting Lee Center meeting participants. **Wedeles** said there were good survey responses on Montgomery Park, but low turnout. Staff went to the North East Civic Association for Powhatan Park.

Browand said staff can look at outreach for workshops. **Baum** suggested adding QR Codes along with signage. **Wedeles** said this can be done. Atkins thanked Wedeles for her report.

- IV. **Commission Business:** Jennifer Atkins, Co-Chair. **Atkins** said that the Budget Financial Advisory Committee (BFAC) released a memorandum to City Council that includes public/private partnerships with parks, schools and shared services between ACPS and RPCA. She encouraged Commissioners who are interested in working on public/private partnerships issues to let her know.

- V. **Reports from Commissioners by District (verbal updates):** None.

- VI. **Next Meeting:** Special Meeting, Public Hearing on the Potomac Yards Metrorail Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS), May 7, 2015, 7:00 p.m., Lee Center, 1108 Jefferson St. The P&RC regular meeting is scheduled for May 21, 2015 at Charles Houston Center, 901 Wythe St.

- VII. **Adjourned:** 8:27 p.m.